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ABSTRACT

A group of 100 black ghetto residents was surveyed to learn what stereotypes they held of whites, Mexican-Americans, and Japanese-Americans. The subjects were asked to check adjectives in a list which they thought characteristic of members of each ethnic group. The results showed that blacks have strongly negative views of whites, whom they see as evasive, critical, aggressive, ignorant, boastful, and of Mexican-Americans, who are considered emotional, radical, talkative, argumentative, and loud. Blacks perceive Japanese-Americans more favorably: they are intelligent, industrious, soft-spoken, reserved, and non-militant. (Although some of these traits may be seen as unfavorable, the overall impression is favorable.) Comparisons with previous research show that blacks and whites stereotype each other in the same way to some extent, and also that blacks and whites share similar stereotypes of Chicanos and Japanese-Americans. The consequences of these images render interracial communication difficult, if not impossible, because of the lack of empathy and trust between blacks and whites. (JK)

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BLACK STEREOTYPES OF NON-BLACK COMMUNICATORS: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY

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I.

When strangers communicate, they seldom interact in a vacuum. They bring with them pre-conceptions of persons, places, and things which dictate how their interaction will proceed. Such pre-conceptions are frequently referred to as "stereotypes." Stereotypes are commonly defined as relatively simple, general, rigid cognitions of social groups which blind the individual to the manifold differences among members of any group--racial, ethnic, age, sex, or social class.[1] Further, stereotypes are viewed as relatively favorable or unfavorable cognitions attributed to a group of people.[2]

Stereotypes are self perpetuating. According to Lippmann, when a system of stereotypes is well fixed, attention is called to those facts which support it and diverted from those which contradict it.[3] Such a process of selective perception can doom an interaction since an individual with a negative pre-conception of his partner in interaction will find those traits he expects to find and ignore facts which conflict with his stereotype.

Studies in sociology and social psychology have contributed much to understanding the nature of general pre-conceptions held of various racial, ethnic, and national groups. Katz and Braly[4] pioneered the measurement of stereotypes and perfected the methodology employed in this study. While the forementioned researchers dealt mainly with general stereotypes, more recent research by Ogawa[5] has adapted the Katz and Braly method to the study of "Communication" stereotypes, or those perceived traits which are deemed to directly affect human interaction.

Both the Katz and Braly study and the Ogawa research have dealt only with the measurement of white perceptions of non-whites. The study to be presented in this paper is designed to discover, for the first time, black perceptions of non-black communicators. Interracial communication studies have, for too long, been conducted primarily from a white point of view. In a polyethnic society, it is imperative to learn the stereotypes held by all racial and ethnic groups.[6] Such information can have far reaching implications for the prospect of productive communication between races.

II.

This study employs the Katz and Braly methodology for discovering stereotypes. First, a stereotype check list dealing with ethnic communication characteristics was developed. Thirty black UCLA undergraduate students were asked to list what they considered to be the communication characteristics of three major ethnic groups in the Los Angeles area. Specifically, subjects were asked: "List the specific characteristics you think are typical of the communicative behavior of white, Chicano, and Japanese Americans." The student list was supplemented with words from Katz and Braly's original list which were relevant to this study, from Ogawa's list of communicative traits,[7] and from the investigators' research into contemporary stereotypes found in newspapers, magazines, and books. All of the following 57 adjectives were randomly placed to form the completed check list:

HESITANT	PASSIVE
INTELLIGENT	EVASIVE
ARGUMENTATIVE	CONVENTIONAL
CRITICAL	PERSISTENT
NON-MILITANT	OSTENTATIOUS (SHOWY)
PRACTICAL	OBLIGING
SUBMISSIVE	RADICAL
MEDITATIVE	LOUD
BOASTFUL	SENSITIVE
IGNORANT	COURTEOUS
WITTY	HOSTILE
INDUSTRIOUS	RESERVED
EMOTIONAL	NON-DIRECTIVE
EFFICIENT	JOVIAL
SUAVE	INARTICULATE
RESISTENT	SOFT-SPOKEN
METHODICAL	HUMBLE
ALERT	CONFORMABLE
STRAIGHTFORWARD	OPEN
QUIET	INDIVIDUALISTIC
QUARRELSOME	FLUENT

CONSERVATIVE	SILENT
ARROGANT	RESPONSIVE
CONCEALING	INCOMPREHENSIBLE
AGGRESSIVE	TALKATIVE
UNINVOLVED	RUDE
IMAGINATIVE	DEFIANT
NOISEY	IMITATIVE
DIRECTIVE	

This list was administered to one hundred black residents between the ages of 18 and 25 living in the East Los Angeles ghetto. Those conducting the survey were black research assistants who were able to overcome the natural reticence demonstrated by members of the black community in responding to surveys conducted by white scholars. Written instructions supplied to the subjects were:

> Read through the list of words on page one and select those which seem to you typical of the communicative behavior of 1. white Americans, 2. Mexican Americans and 3. Japanese Americans. Write as many of these words in the following spaces as you think are necessary to characterize the communication of each of these groups. If you do not find appropriate words on page one for all the typical characteristics, you may add those which you think are necessary for an adequate description.

A separate page for each ethnic group followed this paragraph of instructions in which subjects wrote in the traits they considered typical communiative behavior of members of each of the races. Upon the completion of the listing of traits, subjects were asked to go back over the three lists of words they chose and mark with an X the five words in each list which seemed the most typical of the communicative actions of the racial group in question.

To determine the degree to which each of the groups was stereotyped, the study employed the Katz and Braly method for estimating the degree of

agreement. Had there been no patterning in the images the subjects held of the various groups. 28.5 (half) of the traits would have received 50 percent of the votes. On the other hand, if the subjects had agreed perfectly on the five traits typical of a group, 2.5 traits would have received 50 percent of the votes. It was thus reasonably determined that if thirteen traits or less received over half of the votes, a group could be considered stereotyped, for this sum would be far from a chance selection. One could deduce that even if the least degree of agreement was 13 traits, some degree of uniformity exists, given in comparison, the 28.5 traits which would have occurred purely by chance.

III.

The results of the stereotype list are presented in Table I, which includes the twelve characteristics most frequently assigned to the three racial groups by the one hundred black subjects. The table summarizes the traits which the subjects checked as the five most typical communicative characteristics of each group.

TABLE I

The Twelve Communicative Traits Most Frequently
Assigned to the Three Ethnic Groups
by 100 Black, UCLA Students

Traits Checked (rank order)	No.	Percent
White Americans		
Evasive	40.50	40.50
Critical	25.62	25.62
Conservative	23.97	23.97
Ignorant	23.97	23.97
Boastful	23.14	23.14
Aggressive	22.31	22.31
Arrogant	20.66	20.66
Ostentatious (showy)	20.66	20.66
Concealing	19.01	19.01
Emotional	18.18	18.18
Individualistic	14.88	14.88
Non-Militant	14.88	14.88
Japanese Americans		
Intelligent	46.67	46.67
Industrious	40.00	40.00
Soft-Spoken	36.67	36.67
Reserve	35.83	35.83
Non-Militant	32.50	32.50
Quiet	30.00	30.00
Courteous	25.83	25.83
Humble	20.00	20.00
Submissive	19.17	19.17
Uninvolved	17.50	17.50
Sensitive	17.50	17.50
Passive	17.50	17.50
Efficient	17.50	17.50
Mexican Americans		
Emotional	51.72	51.72
Radical	25.00	25.00
Talkative	23.28	23.28
Argumentative	22.41	22.41
Loud	22.41	22.41
Aggressive	21.55	21.55
Sensitive	18.97	18.97
Critical	15.52	15.52
Defiant	14.66	14.66
Straightforward	14.66	14.66
Rude	13.79	13.79
Ostentatious (showy)	12.93	12.93

TABLE II

The Least Number of Communicative Traits Which Must be Taken to Include Fifty Percent of the Possible Assignments for Each Ethnic Group

Group (rank order)	No. Traits Required
Japanese Americans	7.15
White Americans	10.80
Mexican Americans	11.46

IV.

BLACK STEREOTYPES OF WHITE COMMUNICATORS

The results presented in Table I suggest that the blacks tested in this study held primarily negative pre-conceptions of white communicators. 40.50% agreed that whites are "[illegible]asive." This term, coupled with the inclusion of the term "concealing" suggests that the blacks in this study profoundly lack trust in white communicators. Another series of adjectives chosen reveals an avoidance response on the part of blacks to whites in communication situations. Blacks see whites as "critical," "boastful," "aggressive," "arrogant," "ostentatious," and "emotional."[8] Such adjectives could be interpreted as fear evoking traits. A final group of traits attributed by blacks to whites may be classified as political. Blacks perceive whites as "conservative," "non-militant," and "ignorant." In a time when many blacks are "militantly" rebelling against a "conservative" establishment, these terms could also be interpreted as representing a negative response of blacks to whites. The term "ignorant" is an interesting one for blacks to apply to whites, given the advantages in education whites have usually had over blacks. After discussion reuse of this term in several interracial communication situations, the researchers interpret "ignorant" as applying to the white man's lack of understanding of the conditions and problems in the non-white world.

An interesting comparison can be made between the image blacks hold of whites as revealed in this study and the image whites hold of blacks as presented in the Ogawa study.[9] Four of the traits which blacks ascribe to whites, whites also ascribe to blacks: "emotional," "aggressive,"

"critical," and "ostentatious." While any one of these terms is not necessarily negative in connotative value, (emotional, for example), taken together, they seem to describe the existence of a mutual contempt between the black and white communicators tested. Further, while in this study, blacks regarded whites as "evasive," in the Ogawa study, whites viewed blacks as "straightforward." That whites view blacks as straightforward is rather ironic in light of the recent discussions and explanations of the complex roles blacks have assumed in the presence of whites which in many ways do not reflect their true feelings and desires.[10]

BLACK STEREOTYPES OF MEXICAN AMERICAN COMMUNICATORS

Black perceptions of Mexican Americans as revealed in this study are similar to the white perceptions of Mexican Americans as reported in the Ogawa study.

Black Perceptions	White Perceptions
emotional	emotional
radical	argumentative
talkative	sensitive
argumentative	straightforward
loud	talkative
aggressive	intelligent
sensitive	persistent
critical	loud
defiant	courteous
straightforward	hesitant
rude	critical
ostentatious	open

A comparison of these lists demonstrates that blacks and whites had a 50% agreement on the traits they attributed to Mexican American communicators. Both groups perceive Chicanos as "emotional," "talkative," "straightforward," "critical," "loud," and "argumentative." The white stereotype of

Chicanos appears to be slightly less negative than the black view, since whites chose non-threatening terms such as "courteous" and "hesitant" while blacks chose the opposite terms of "rude" and "radical."

There are several explanations for the disparate views held of Chicanos by blacks and whites and the seemingly negative pre-conceptions blacks hold of Chicanos. It is possible that whites interact with Chicanos under different conditions than do blacks, or that both blacks and whites perceive Chicanos as white, and hence, blacks view them more negatively than do whites. A further explanation of the hostility revealed between blacks and Chicanos in this study lies in the nature of the ghetto conditions in which blacks and Chicanos co-exist. Both groups (blacks and Chicanos) share the same physical and psychological space allocated to them by the white society; thus, in many instances, they are forced to compete with each other for the favors of the white society. Such competition may have created animosity, with racial and ethnic ties taking precedence over common economic-class problems.

It should be added that many groups of blacks and Chicanos (especially in universities and colleges) would deny the existence of this hostility in an attempt to build a united front against the white establishment and to fight against allowing depressed conditions to split non-white unity. The empirical results of this study conducted among ghetto blacks, however, reveals that attempts at building unity of non-whites has not yet diminished the negative pre-conceptions which the blacks here tested hold of Chicanos.

Others, seeing these results, have argued that adjectives such as "radical," "defiant," and "aggressive," do not necessarily have negative

connotations for blacks. Indeed, it could be advanced that those with the above mentioned traits would be admired by blacks for their revolutionary posture. This argument has some merit when one views certain of the traits chosen out of context, but when one examines the total profile of adjectives chosen, it becomes apparent that the distinctly negative connotations of terms such as "rude" and "ostentatious" suggest that the list as a whole is reflective of a negative stereotype held by blacks of Chicanos.

BLACK STEREOTYPES OF JAPANESE AMERICANS

The black response to the portion of the survey dedicated to traits of Japanese Americans again demonstrates the trans-racial strength of stereotypes, since blacks of this study expressed approximately 66.6% agreement with the whites of Ogawa's study regarding the views both groups held of Japanese Americans.

Black Perceptions	White Perceptions
intelligent	intelligent
industrious	courteous
soft-spoken	industrious
reserved	quiet
non-militant	soft-spoken
quiet	reserved
courteous	sensitive
humble	efficient
submissive	practical
uninvolved	alert
sensitive	humble
passive	conservative
efficient	

Connotations of the adjectives chosen to apply to Japanese Americans by both black and white groups were generally positive with regard to the over-all values of our society, with the blacks choosing a few negative political

terms (negative to blacks) such as "non-militant" and "conservative." As we can see from Table II, of all the groups tested, the Japanese Americans are the most strongly stereotyped with over fifty percent of the black respondents agreeing on 7.15 traits. Likewise, in Ogawa's study, fifty percent of the white subjects agreed on 4.75 traits.

V.

The results of this study have several implications for researchers concerned with interracial communication. The stereotypes which blacks hold of white communicators are so negative, that, with the influence of selective perception reinforcing these negative views, productive interracial communication is rendered difficult, it not impossible, at times. The study reveals a great lack of trust and empathy between blacks and whites in communication situations creating an enormous interpersonal gap which must be overcome if interracial communication is to occur without the disruption caused by eruptions of antagonism and hostility.

The study has also demonstrated that stereotypes are so strong they cross racial and ethnic barriers. Such an occurrence is not surprising when one considers some of the ways in which stereotypes are developed. All groups in this country are subjected to certain common mass media such as radio, television, motion pictures, magazines, newspapers, and books. Many of our stereotypes are learned and reinforced through these media, and membership in one racial group or another does not make us immune to their influence.

The tendency to rely on stereotypes to ease the difficulty of interacting with those strange to us is extremely strong for all human beings, regardless of ethnic or racial identity. It is easier to draw upon pre-conceptions when in doubt than it is to make the effort to seek out and know individuals. We program ourselves to categorize first, and respond later. While stereotypes are thus helpful in ordering the complexity

of human experience, they interfere with meaningful interaction, as they predispose interaction between pre-conceptions held by the participants rather than between the participants themselves.

Researchers and instructors in interracial communication must address themselves to the problem of overcoming the stifling effects of strong racial and ethnic stereotyping if multi-racial and multi-ethnic communication is to occur. The unfortunate alternative to fighting the negative results of stereotyping is the acceptance of an even more polarized society where individuals are posed to do battle with the "windmills of their minds."

FOOTNOTES

1. David Krech, et. al., Individual In Society, (New York: McGraw Hill Co., Inc., 1962), p. 55.
2. A. L. Edwards, "Studies of Stereotypes: 1. The Directionality and Uniformity of Response to Stereotypes," Journ. Soc. Psychol., 12(1940), 357-366.
3. Walter Lippman, Public Opinion, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1922), pp. 70-130.
4. D. Katz and K. W. Braly, "Stereotypes of 100 College Students," Journ. Abnorm. Soc. Psychol., 28(1933), 280-290.
5. Dennis Ogawa, "Small Group Communication Stereotypes of Black Americans," Journ. of Black Studies, I (March 1971), 273-281.
6. Future studies by these researchers will deal with stereotypes held by Chicanos and Japanese.
7. Ogawa, op. cit. p. 278.
8. Individual adjectives such as "emotional" do not necessarily suggest a negative connotation, but viewed within the total profile of response, tend to point to unfavorable attitudes.
9. Ogawa, op. cit.
10. cfr. Sam Greenlee, The Spook Who Sat by the Door, New York: Bantam Books, 1970.
11. Ogawa, op. cit.